CHAPTER 3
SECTION 15.11

ELECTRICAL STIMULATION OF THE PERIPHERAL NERVE

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Authority: 32 CFR 199.4(d)(1)

I. PROCEDURE CODE RANGE

64550 - 64595

II. DESCRIPTION

A. Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) is the electrical stimulation of the peripheral nerves from the surface of the skin.

B. Percutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (PENS) is the electrical stimulation of the peripheral nerves by a needle electrode inserted through the skin.

III. POLICY

Electrical stimulation of the peripheral nerves is covered, when medically necessary, for the treatment of acute post-operative pain, chronic, severe and intractable pain when other methods of pain control have been unsuccessful.

IV. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

A. Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) Coverage guidelines are as follows:

1. During the diagnostic trial period of up to four (4) weeks, two (2) treatments a week may be allowed for instruction in the use of TENS and assessment of its effectiveness. Any visits required beyond four (4) weeks must be documented for medical necessity and the claims sent to medical review. One month's rental of the TENS device may be paid during the diagnostic trial period.

2. When used for the purpose of treating acute post-operative pain,

a. TENS devices are considered supplies, and as such may be billed as hospital services furnished to inpatients and covered as indicated in Chapter 13, Section 6.1A, or

b. TENS devices are considered incidental to a physician's service when furnished in connection with surgery performed on an outpatient basis.

c. An initial office visit is covered in addition to the TENS treatment.

3. An established patient office visit for the same diagnosis will not be covered on the same day that the TENS treatment is given.

4. TENS and PENS are covered only when performed by a physician or incident to physician's service.

B. Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (PENS) Coverage guidelines are as follows:

1. During a diagnostic trial period of up to four (4) weeks, two (2) procedures a week may be allowed. Any procedures required beyond four (4) weeks must be documented as to medical necessity and the claims and supporting information sent to medical review.

2. An initial office visit is covered in addition to the PENS procedure.

3. After the initial visit, an office visit for the same diagnosis will not be covered on the same day that the PENS procedure is performed.

4. Where TENS produces incomplete relief, further evaluation with Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (PENS) may be considered to determine whether an implanted peripheral nerve stimulator would provide significant relief from pain.

5. If pain is effectively controlled by PENS, implantation of electrodes is warranted.

C. A form-fitting conductive garment (and medically necessary related supplies) may be covered under the program only when it has received permission or approval for marketing by the FDA, it has been prescribed by the attending or primary physician for use in delivering covered TENS, or NMES treatment and one of the medical indications outlined below is met:

1. The patient cannot manage without the conductive garment because there is such a large area or so many sites to be stimulated and the stimulation would have to be delivered so frequently that it is not feasible to use conventional electrodes, adhesive tapes and lead wires.

2. The patient has a documented medical condition such as skin problems that preclude the application of conventional electrodes, adhesive tapes and lead wires.

3. The patient requires electrical stimulation beneath a cast either to treat disuse atrophy, where the nerve supply to the muscle is intact, or to treat chronic intractable pain, or

4. The patient has a medical need for rehabilitation straightening (pursuant to a written plan of rehabilitation) following any injury where the nerve supply to the muscle is intact.

5. A conductive garment is not covered for use with a TENS device during the trial period unless:

a. The patient has a documented skin problem prior to the start of the period specified in paragraph IV.A.

b. A conductive garment for use with a TENS device during the trial period is subject to medical review for medical necessity.

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D. TENS and PENS units are considered durable medical equipment and subject to the provisions of Chapter 7, Section 3.1 and Chapter 13, Section 1.1.

E. Benefits may be extended for medically necessary follow-up visits to monitor the patient's medical status.

F. Once a patient has been taught how to employ transcutaneous and percutaneous stimulation, it can be used safely and effectively without direct physician supervision. Consequently, it is inappropriate for a patient to visit a physician or outpatient clinic on a continuing basis for treatment of pain with electrical nerve stimulation. Therefore, the transcutaneous and percutaneous treatments, rather than the diagnostic services, are excluded from coverage.

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